



Great Maps

Jerry Brotton

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The world's finest maps explored and explained. From Ptolemy's world map to the Hereford's Mappa Mundi, through Mercator's map of the world to the latest maps of the Moon and Google Earth, *Great Maps* provides a fascinating overview of cartography through the ages.

Revealing the stories behind 55 historical maps by analyzing graphic close-ups, *Great Maps* also profiles key cartographers and explorers to look why each map was commissioned, who it was for and how they influenced navigation, propaganda, power, art, and politics.

Great Maps Details

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From Reader Review Great Maps for online ebook

Layla Johnston says

Unfortunately the author continues to use phrases such as "so and so discovered Australia." The use of outdated and clearly incorrect biased statements distracted me from the analysis of the maps. Most disappointing is Brotton's statement on p. 153: "Nantucket comes from the Algonquian for faraway island. Although some local names survived, the natives did not." It is unclear from his wording if he is referring to only Nantucket, but this incorrectly perpetuates the myth that no Indians are left in New England, or that Indians are historical relics and not living peoples all over the U.S. Come on, Smithsonian & DK books: you know better.

Jbondandrews says

I very much enjoyed reading this book. The maps were amazing. So many different types, I was glad to see Zheng He's map included.

Dan says

Wonderful large-format book with beautiful color maps and explanations of each. I really enjoyed the detail sections that highlighted individual areas of each map. There are a huge number of maps profiled, many of which I've never heard of before, and they were so much fun to dive into. The pages were large enough and high enough quality to expose significant detail on many of the maps, so you could explore them yourself, without the need for the guided tour of text.

Expositions of maps like this always amaze me: I can't imagine a time when there were parts of the world that were just wholly unknown. Since I've lived almost my entire life at a time when the entire world could be mapped out easily online, it's a very unfamiliar feeling – and also enticing. Exploring isn't even necessary to me... just imagine being the first person to draw a map of a certain part of the world!

My only complaint would be that the diversity of maps here is not as good as it could be – most of the Eastern maps displayed are more decorative and less detailed than the European ones – but there must have been useful maps that other cultures created as well. Honestly, I probably would've wanted more maps even if the book had included a thousand specimens.

It would have been nice if the book had included more text about the maps, but that wasn't the type of book this was; that should be saved for A History of the World in 12 Maps! The funny thing is that book has been on my "currently reading" shelf since June 9th, 2014....

While originally skeptical because of its Dorling Kindersley label, mostly associated with Childrens' books, I was pleasantly surprised and would be happy to read more along those lines. Recommended to map fans.

Leon Hermanson says

Perfect book for map lovers! Really good selection and interesting details.

Tim Poston says

I love maps -- all maps, from the distribution of diseases to Tolkien's Middle Earth. But most of all, old maps, that give a window into how other peoples have seen the world. Often, though (for instance, in map calendars) they come with too little information to do more than admire the art. Brotton sets them in context, picks out revealing details, and shares a rich grasp of their historical and navigational meaning. (Even if he does think *fortuitous* means 'fortunate', not 'by chance'. Don't mind me, I'm an immigrant from the 20th Century.)

A detail: the Sawley Map (the earliest known English *mappa mundi*, around 1200CE has the pyramids marked as "Joseph's Barns", for storing grain against famine in seven years' time, fitting them into the Biblical story despite obviously needing far more time to build. Apparently this has lingered on, to survive as a Seventh Day Adventist story for Sunday School, and emerge as an adult opinion of Ben Carson's. So he's not original even in his errors!

Adan says

So many great maps in this book! Most of them are "proper" representations of the world as we know it today, but there are a few, more esoteric maps, like a Jain cosmological map, an Aztec map of Tenochtitlan, a Korean Cho'onhado (or Map of All Under Heaven as detailed in the Chinese text Classic of Mountains and Seas), a missionary map detailing the end times (complete with Horsemen of the Apocalypse and the Whore of Babylon), and a cartogram showing population sizes mapped onto a traditional political map (thereby distorting what we expect to see). It's truly an amazing book showing some awesome maps.

And yes, Ptolemy is a complete dick.

James says

Great maps (as the name implies), interesting notes, beautiful image quality. I wonder about some of the content choices, as there seems to be a real missed opportunity to better weave the narrative of history into the timeline of the maps, rather than simply lay them all out in chronological order.

Michael Mesarch says

This is a great book for the map nerds out there in the world.

Douglas Summers-Stay says

This is a collection of important and elegant maps all throughout history. Although the pages are quite large,

it was the first time I have ever gotten a magnifying glass out to study the details of a book more closely. The most interesting parts, of course, are the things the mapmakers got wrong.

The book is mostly a presentation of the maps themselves. There are just a few paragraphs putting each map into context, and then a second two-page spread that pulls out a few details from the map to highlight and explain.

There are a couple of invented maps of Utopias, but the rest are all legitimate maps, with an emphasis on maps of the whole world.

Stephen Simpson says

A great review of numerous significant or influential maps, including more detailed sub-sections and reasonably detailed explanations of what made the particular map noteworthy. Already a large and somewhat unwieldy book, it could have included probably another 50-100 pages without being significantly more inconvenient to read (although I'm not sure what that would mean for production costs).

Tanya says

When I was a little girl during summer vacation my mom would take a trip to Utah-Idaho Supply and buy all sorts of maps and colored pencils, then each day we would fill in a different map. I remember writing in the names of European countries I hoped to visit someday, drawing mountain ranges and labeling rivers, drawing different pictographs to represent products made in each area... I have always had a fascination with maps.

This large illustrated hard-covered book is a sort of history of cartography, beginning with the earliest "maps" drawn on cave walls and carved on steles, progressing all the way up to Google Earth. I liked the chronological organization, which showed the development of different ideas and map-making techniques. I also liked how each map was presented as a whole, then different sections of it were highlighted and more detailed information was given. I was also intrigued that Brotton chose to include not only two-dimensional maps of actual places, but also a few theoretical religious "maps," depictions of Utopia, and even a "stick" map of Polynesian ocean currents.

Some of the earlier maps were less interesting to me, but those from the 19th century forwards were fascinating. Some of my favorites were the 1860 map showing the percentage of slaves in each Southern state, John Snow's London Cholera map, the original 1933 London "tube" map, and the 1970 map of the ocean floor. It's amazing the amount of information that can be conveyed through these pictorial representations of the earth.

The only thing that persuades me to give [Great Maps](#) 4 stars instead of 5 is that at times the text was not as superb as the maps themselves. Still, I enjoyed reading it.

Jarrett says

Pornography for geographers. Couldn't put it down.

Cindy Dyson Eitelman says

There's so much learning crammed into this book, my feeble little brain couldn't take it all in. It's an oversized picture book, each two or four-page spread showing and explaining a map that's either significant, beautiful, or puzzling. In some cases a map is really a collection of maps, like the Vatican Gallery of Maps. What a thing to see!

I was amused by his method of illustrating the size of the maps. Beside each was a figure of a human or else a human hand, showing its size relative to something we're all familiar with. A surprising number of them were much larger than a human being.

He did marvelous work of condensing big things into (relatively) small pages. I was disappointed only by the amount of space they gave up to show pictures that came out as big blurs. The small, blown-up pictures of areas of the maps--those were great. But a few of the "bigger picture" items were just wasted space.

Like many books of illustration, someday this book should be remade as an online resource. Then the viewer could expand and contract to the limits of his thumb and forefinger.

James says

As the title promises, this is a great collection of maps through the ages. A visual stunner, it offers introductions to everything from ancient carvings scratched into exposed stone to the first rendering of the world's ocean floors.

The maps are typically presented in two-page spreads, with another spread following to highlight details in close up. There are ancient mariner charts, metaphorical maps of world faiths and detailed graphical renderings of disease and poverty. The drawings are beautiful to look at and offer an engaging visual timeline as to how knowledge advanced with the maps in these pages.

My biggest complaint is probably unfair, but I wish every map here got more of an explanation. Each could probably stand a full chapter to place it in its proper visual and historic context. I realize that's beyond that scope of what the creators of "Great Maps" were trying to achieve, but I kept wanting more as I read it. (It's not always clear what's being called out in the highlights as well, a relatively minor complaint.)

This is a great collection, though, worthy of a close reading or a nice "pick it up and flip" approach.

My Favorite Maps

Carte Pisane

Catalan Atlas by Abraham Cresques

Fra Mauro's World Map

"Indian Territory" Map by Henry Schenck Tanner

London Poverty Map by Charles Booth

World Ocean Floor by Marie Tharp and Bruce Heezen

Sohee says

Very informative. Good layout. Beautiful maps through the ages. I particularly enjoyed the map of Nova Utopia.

When I was travelling, I always wondered what ancient artifacts or maps meant. While reading this book, it brought me back to my memories from Jordan (Madaba map), Vatican City (the Gallery of Maps), and Mexico City (National Museum of Anthropology).
